



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

The next generation may vote differently just ask the Scots

Citation for published version:

Eichhorn, J, *The next generation may vote differently just ask the Scots*, 2014, Web publication/site, Conversation Blog. <<http://theconversation.com/the-next-generation-may-vote-differently-just-ask-the-scots-28011>>

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



THE CONVERSATION

16 June 2014, 2.13pm BST

The next generation may vote differently, just ask the Scots

AUTHOR



Jan Eichhorn

Chancellor's Fellow (Social Policy) at University of Edinburgh



Why do 14-17s have such different views to 18-24s? East Lothian Museums, CC BY-SA

There seems to be a contradiction in the media reports about young people and their voting intentions in the Scottish referendum. While many polls and the Scottish Social Attitudes survey have found that young voters were most likely to vote for independence compared to all older age groups, our recent survey at the University of Edinburgh pointed to young people being most sceptical about voting for independence – albeit with substantially more yes supporters compared to 2013.

The reason for this apparent contradiction is that it makes a difference who we consider to be “young” people. Most surveys and polls include those aged up to 24 in the youngest group – starting either at 16 or 18. That means that results of this group mainly represent those who have left school and are mostly either in jobs, training or university. Our survey of 14 to 17-year-olds (conducted in April and May 2014) largely reflects young people who are still in secondary education or have only very recently left it.

Of those currently younger than 18 years old, but at least 16 by referendum day, and therefore eligible to vote, we found that 36% were in favour of an independent Scotland (up from 28% in 2013). There were 64% supporting no once those undecided are excluded. This compares to 45% yes support amongst those aged 16 to 24 in the latest Ipsos Mori poll conducted several weeks ago, again excluding the don't knows.

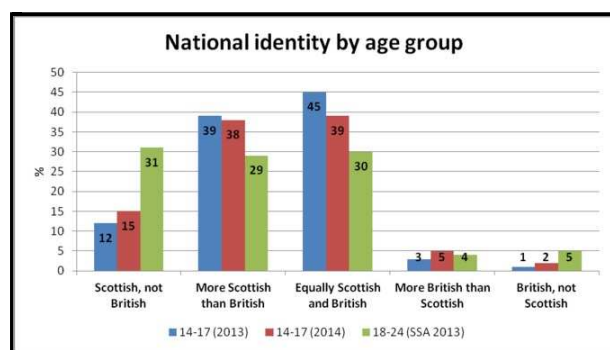
Why the difference?

These differences may have to do with changes in political attitudes, in some cases affected by going to university; greater willingness to take risks and other effects that we cannot directly observe in a two-year referendum process. We would need longer term panel data following students from school through training, work or university.

However, when you examine what we do know about the attitudes of the current under-18s and young people in their late teens and early twenties, you find substantial differences between them. This suggests that their different voting intentions may be explained by genuine divergences in their characteristics.

This becomes apparent if we look at the national identity findings in the Scottish Social Attitudes survey. Those in the 18-24 year age group are much more likely to favour their Scottish identity over their British identity (30% in 2014), or to identify themselves solely as Scottish (31%). Among the 14-17s, only 12% (2013) and 15% (2014) singled out their Scottish identity, while about four in ten say they are equally Scottish and British.

In both groups, fewer than 10% favoured their British over their Scottish identity. With the younger group it is not that they identify less with Scotland, but rather they are less willing to favour one identity over the other.

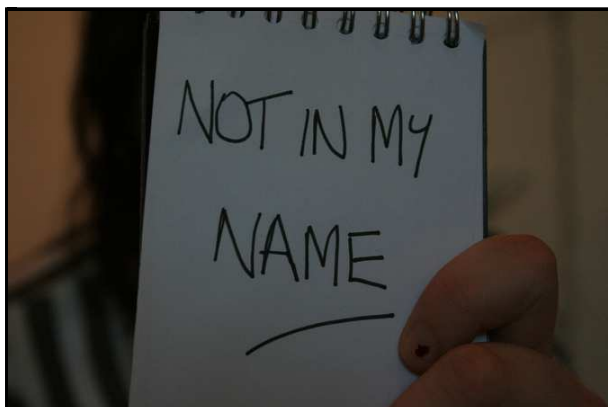


Scottish Social Attitudes Survey

[Click to enlarge](#)

A message to eurosceptics, too

This finding does not only apply to the union in the UK, but also to a larger one – the European Union. While people's attitudes towards the EU are associated with age generally, there is again a significant difference between the 14-17s and the 18-24s.

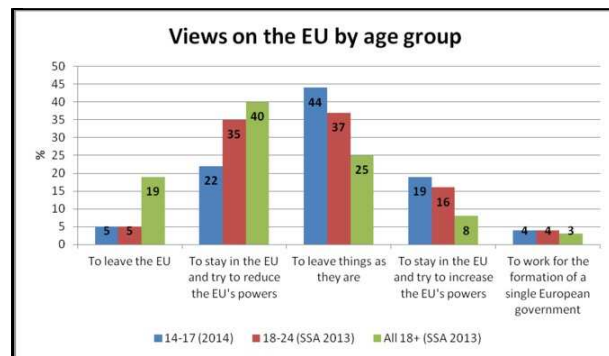


Young teens are more anti-independence and pro-EU Liz

Ferla, CC BY-SA

[Click to enlarge](#)

The youngest age group has the least negative views towards Britain's role in Europe, with only 27% wishing for EU powers to be reduced or for Britain to leave. In contrast 40% of 18-24 year olds and 59% of all adults older than 18 in Scotland held these views (2013 figures). As many as 44% of 14-17s are happy with the status quo, compared to 37% of the 18-24s and 25% in the adult population overall. This seems to confirm the general idea that the younger age group are less likely to want to confine themselves to smaller areas.



Scottish Social Attitudes survey

[Click to enlarge](#)

This different attitude may be one (of several) reasons for the contrasting voting intentions between the youngest and slightly less young voters. Beyond my previous tentative suggestions, we would need further research to establish the underlying causes.

This would help us to distinguish things to do with general life course from specific effects, such as the potential impact of 14-17s having grown up entirely in a networked computer world. Those in their early twenties may still remember the time when it was emerging, meaning they were socialised in a less interactive world. These findings may provide an interesting foundation for research into the political attitudes of young people that go far beyond the referendum.